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ABSTRACT

The booklet looks at some of the major "myth-conceptions" about gifted students. Among the 12 "myth-conceptions" addressed are the following: special provisions for gifted students are undemocratic: gifted students, already blessed with more than their share of skills and talents, do not need our concern: bright children and youth can take care of themselves, can achieve at a superior level without special assistance, and can make it on their own: gifted students are the "cream" of the academic crop, and all of us know that cream always rises to the top: special programs for gifted students separate them from others and create an elite group--a group that might take over and control our society, leaving the rest of us without anything to say: a good program for gifted students is good for all students: priorities, more competing, and more obvious such as funds to support programs for disadvantaged and handicapped students, deserve more immediate attention than programs for the gifted: gifted students are products of suburbia and of well educated parents who represent the elitist society: we wouldn't need a special program for gifted students if classroom teachers were doing their right job: individualized instruction abolishes the need for separate programs for gifted students: gifted students are immature and maladjusted--they will suffer if allowed to skip a grade or two: and we believe that "all children are gifted." (SBH)

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# MYTH-CONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

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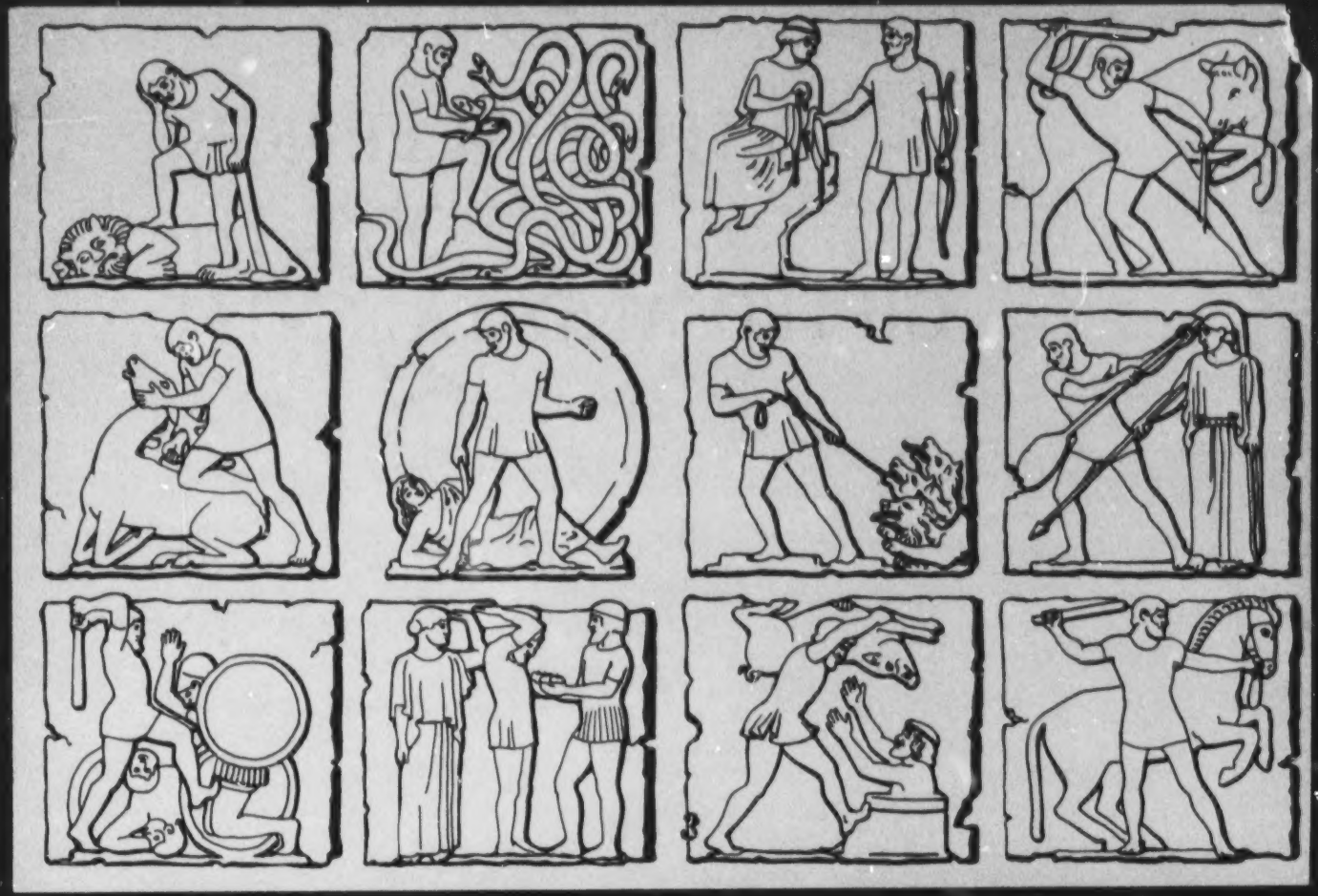


# Prologue

Not too long ago, school administrators noticed that some of the students on their Average Daily Attendance rolls were, if anything, not "average" at all.

Some of their students had different needs.

The administrators also discovered that students with different needs can be identified. But it often takes a person with a special affinity for children and youth to discover them among their peers.

The school people also found it takes a special kind of training for teachers to recognize the specialized talents of this particular group of students who—according to best estimates available—number at least 150,000 of the Texas public school population.

But don't try to pinpoint these students into any particular group. They come from all ethnic groups. And from all economic circumstances.

Who are these students?

They're the gifted and talented (referred to hereafter as the gifted).

Gifted students are those who, because of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. Students in this group are a special pupil population. They demonstrate achievement or show potential in one or more areas such as the academics, the arts, creative thinking, leadership, and mechanical ability. The development of these talents requires programs or services beyond the level of those ordinarily provided in regular school programs.

Many of those closest to gifted children—everyone from their parents and teachers to their peers and the public—have misconceptions about them. These misconceptions—can we call them myth-conceptions?—almost always fail to tell us what the gifted student is really like, and all about.

This booklet is designed to look at some of the major myth-conceptions about gifted students and to separate fact from fiction.

# Myth-Conception:

**Special provisions for gifted students are undemocratic.**

*6*

# Fact:

The answer depends upon word interpretation. If "democratic educational practice" means the same education for all students, the answer is "yes." If "democratic educational practice" means "appropriate educational opportunities keyed to a person's ability to benefit," the answer is "no."

Those answering "yes" may see all special educational programs as undemocratic and prefer that they disappear.[1] But isn't the essence of democratic action showing concern for all individuals? Thus, special planning to meet special needs is truly the democratic way to serve all members of the student population.

[1]S.P. Marland, Jr., *Education of the Gifted and Talented,* Volume I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 25-26.

# Myth-Conception:

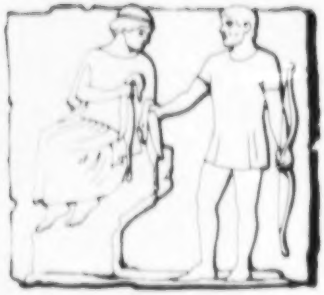
Gifted students, already blessed with more than their share of skills and talents, do not need our concern.

# Fact:

We do not ignore the special needs of those children who are handicapped. Nor should we neglect the special needs of those students labeled as gifted. Rather, we should look upon them as a natural resource to be nurtured now to assure the fulfillment of their potential in the future.

# Myth-Conception:

**Bright children and youth can take care of themselves, can achieve at a superior level without special assistance, and can make it on their own.**



# Fact:

Research negates this myth on several counts. Unless they receive special training, most teachers do not identify with any high degree of accuracy those students who are gifted, bright, talented, or creative. Nor does the group-testing technique necessarily reveal these gifted children.[2]

Research has also shown that many gifted students underachieve. They perform at a level far below their intellectual potential. This loss is particularly critical among students in minority groups where environment may stifle their potential talents.[3]

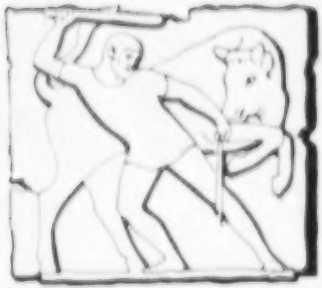
Although academic achievements may set them apart from others, gifted children still share many of the same basic needs as their peers. These needs include understanding, self-esteem, a sense of worthy accomplishment, independence, and love.

If these needs are not met, gifted children—just as any other children—may suffer from problems of anxiety and insecurity, even loneliness. And the higher the capability of these students, the greater may be their problems of adjustment to the world around them.[4]

[2] *Ibid.*, Volume I, p. 18.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[4] Ruth A. Martinson, *The Identification of the Gifted and Talented* (Ventura, California: Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, 1974), p. 14.

# Myth-Conception:

Gifted students are the "cream" of the academic crop, and all of us know that cream always rises to the top.



# Fact:

Admittedly, some gifted students meet classroom requirements easily, complete their work on or ahead of time, and seemingly conform to everyone's expectations—particularly those of teachers and classmates.

However, these students may not reach their own potential. Rather than feel challenged, some of these bright youngsters look for and find a comfortable niche in the existent curriculum. This snug niche allows them to suppress their natural academic brightness or creative abilities.[3]

Which is a "cream" turned sour.

[3]Jeanne L. Delp and Ruth A. Martinson, *The Gifted and Talented: A Handbook for Parents* (Ventura, California: Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, 1975), p. 31.

# Myth-Conception:

Special programs for gifted students separate them from others and create an elite group—a group that might take over and control our society, leaving the rest of us without anything to say.

# Fact:

Research shows that adequate programs for gifted children and youth result not only in improved academic performance but also in better attitudes toward themselves and others. Such programs also bring about improved social relationships and a reduction of behavior problems.

Given the opportunity to function and to achieve, gifted students usually improve not only in their sense of well-being but also in their ability to relate well to others.[6]

[6]Martinson, *The Identification of the Gifted and Talented,* pp. 12-13.

# Myth-Conception:

A good program for gifted students is good for all students.

# Fact:

Simply, the answer is "no." If the program were good for all students, it would not be good for gifted students. And for these reasons.

Bright children need work with content and ideas keyed to their intellectual level. If these children are to improve their specialized talents, they will need instructional assistance that keeps pace with their abilities. Other children cannot keep up with their gifted classmates who, if the program is keyed to their potential, will increasingly depart from the norm in their degree of attainment.

Research shows that when a program for all children is geared to the norm, it limits the potential of those students who are markedly different—that is, those who are gifted as well as those who are handicapped.[7]

[7]Marland, *Education of the Gifted and Talented,* Volume I, p. 27.

# Myth-Conception:

Priorities, more competing and more obvious such as funds to support programs for disadvantaged and handicapped students, deserve more immediate attention than programs for the gifted.

# Fact:

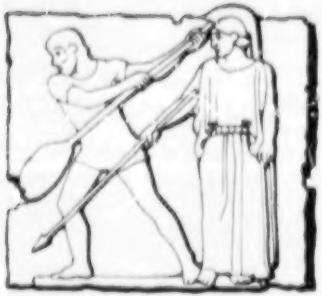
Setting priorities is a complex problem, but no one wants to deny any child the right to an adequate education.

However, attention often focuses on the most obvious problems—such as helping disadvantaged and handicapped students overcome their deficiencies. So the gifted students get shortchanged. Attention to their needs is postponed because they are often able to adjust to the usual school expectations and to achieve without using their true capabilities.[1]

[1]Martinson, *The Identification of the Gifted and Talented,* p. 12.

# Myth-Conception:

Gifted students are products of suburbia and of well-educated parents who represent the elitist society.



# Fact:

Of course not!

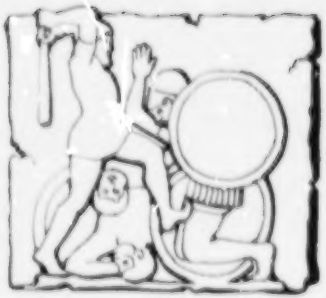
Statistics show that gifted students are found in every ethnic group—and in substantial numbers. Too often, these bright youngsters prefer to go through school unidentified, their gifts disguised by clothing, dialects, or cultural differences not found in the standard middle-class norm of society.

In short, they play it safe—minimizing their abilities so they can resemble the children their own age. This ruse is understandable, however. What child, including those with high academic abilities, want to be singled out as "different"?[9]

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

# Myth-Conception:

We wouldn't need a special program for gifted students if classroom teachers were doing their job.



# Fact:

Like other special populations in the school system, gifted students need teachers trained to serve their needs. In most instances, classroom teachers are generalists, lacking the specialized preparation for working with these students.

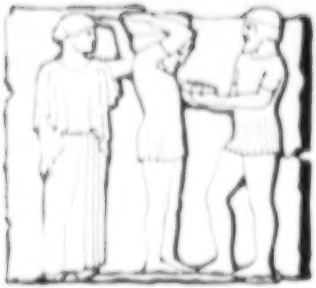
All we should really expect of "regular" teachers is for them to find alternatives for working with the gifted and to guide these bright youngsters toward these alternatives.

Most of all, we should never brand teachers as failures because they cannot be all things to all children.[10]

[10]Sandra N. Kaplan, *Providing Programs for the Gifted and the Talented* (Ventura, California: Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, 1974), p. 12.

# Myth-Conception:

Doesn't individualized instruction abolish the need for separate programs for gifted students?



# Fact:

Individualized instruction implies the need to provide for individual differences within the context of any given administrative arrangement. In its purest form, individualized instruction should provide a separate educational program for every student.

Admittedly, individualized instruction helps gifted students far more than the traditional classroom operation. However, it cannot replace separate programs, which expose students to learning experiences beyond the confines of even the best individually instructed classroom.

We should never accept the idea that any one type of provision will satisfy the needs of gifted students."

"*Ibid.*, p. 11.

# Myth-Conception:

Gifted students are immature and maladjusted. They will suffer if allowed to skip a grade or two.

# Fact:

Because their interests often do differ from those of average students in their age group, gifted students may be regarded as unacceptable in certain groups or socially maladjusted. But to apply such an assumption to the gifted as a population is not a valid judgment.

And for these reasons.

Admittedly, independence of thought, persistence of interests, and nonconformity can be characterized as socially uncomfortable, even abrasive, traits in settings where they are seen as unconventional. And because these traits and interests often do differ from the "norm" of average students, bright children may be regarded as socially maladjusted or unacceptable in certain groups.

Talk to those persons who work closely and extensively with gifted students. They will quickly provide you with a list of characteristics that describe the mature—repeat, the mature—and not the immature child. The list includes such characteristics as individualistic, perceptive, inquisitive, idealistic, goal-oriented, questioning, conscientious, self-reliant, and inventive. Not to mention a high capacity for intense concentration and long spans of attention.[12]

[12]Delp and Martinson, *The Gifted and Talented: A Handbook for Parents,* pp. 8-9.

# Myth-Conception:

We believe that "all children are gifted."

# Fact:

Just ask any parents (or grandparents!) possessed with a normal amount of love if they don't regard their child as being gifted. How quickly they can show you—with objective "evidence" to prove it! All children offer delightful satisfaction to their parents or other adults when they produce new words or new concepts or when they demonstrate new skill in physical, mental, or aesthetic accomplishments.

The key word in answering the question—if there is an answer to such a question—is the matter of "degree." Some children produce actual evidence of giftedness that forecasts unusual accomplishments in the future, while others show potential that is extraordinary for their age group.[13]

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

# Epilogue

An even dozen myths about the gifted.

An equal number of factual statements that refute the myths.

A good beginning.

But only a beginning.

Myths do not always disappear.

We owe it to those who are gifted to see that these even dozen myths are dispelled.

Our credo is clear.

We must separate fact from fiction.

# Acknowledgments

The Texas Education Agency wishes to acknowledge the sources listed below for contributing information and research that went into the development of *Myth-Conceptions About the Gifted and Talented*:

Delp, Jeanne L. and Martinson, Ruth A. *The Gifted and Talented: A Handbook for Parents.* Ventura, California: Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, 1975.

Kaplan, Sandra N. *Providing Programs for the Gifted and the Talented.* Ventura, California: Office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, 1974.

Marland, S.P., Jr. *Education of the Gifted and Talented,* Volumes I and II. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

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Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;

(3) non-discrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) non-discriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) non-discriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

## SECTION 504, REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973; EDUCATION OF THE HANDICAPPED ACT (P.L. 94-142)

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## TITLE IX, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity operated by the Texas Education Agency.

# About This Publication

The tie-in of the Twelve Labors of Hercules to this publication about the 12 most prevalent and persistent myth-conceptions about gifted and talented students is appropriate.

Long ago, the Greek god Hercules had to accomplish an even dozen formidable tasks. Today's tasks seem equally herculean: to destroy each of the myth-conceptions about these bright children.

*Myth-Conceptions About the Gifted and Talented* was developed as the first step toward meeting this challenge.

The display typeface for *Myth-Conceptions About the Gifted and Talented* is Caslon Antique. It bears the name of its designer, the celebrated English type founder William Caslon (1692-1766). In addition to its readability, Caslon Antique has a pleasing weight and sturdiness. All these elements complement the illustrations depicting the excellence of achievement--whether by the gifted in classical civilization or by the gifted and talented today.

The text is set in English Times. Its structural strength lends typographical support to the classical concepts of the publication.

Elaine McKee designed the layout and did the drawings.